

IDEAS AT Work

COMPUTERS/HILLEL SEGAL

‘SafetyNet’ unravels with ‘Word Perfect’

Sometimes it takes several months of using a computer program before all its idiosyncrasies become known. And this turned out to be the case with “SafetyNet,” a nifty program I reviewed in this column last July.

It's everything it's cracked up to be, but I no longer feel it is a necessary or wise purchase in all situations. In particular, if you use “Word Perfect,” the popular word processing program, watch out.

Available from Westlake Data, Austin, Texas, for \$54.95, SafetyNet uses a clever technique to prevent erased files from being overwritten when new files are added to your computer's hard disk or floppy diskettes. The big advantage of SafetyNet is it allows you to easily retrieve files after they may have been accidentally erased or somehow damaged.

First, let me briefly explain how SafetyNet works, so you'll be able to see how it does not work so well with certain other programs.

Normally, when you erase or delete an old file, the file is not actually removed from your computer's disk. Instead, the file directory is just changed to indicate that the space is available to be overwritten by other files.

Using programs like the “Norton Utilities” or “Mace + Utilities” to retrieve erased files, you must act quickly and amend the file directory to put it back in its original form before the space on the disk is overwritten.

What SafetyNet does, which is better than the above programs, is put all erased or deleted files in a “hidden directory.” The files remain fully intact on your hard disk or floppy diskette.

Then, when you create new files, unused areas on the disk are used instead of overwriting the previously erased files.

For example, if you're working on a document, every time you

close it, the file is not deleted but instead is moved to a hidden directory. The next time you open the document, the program will automatically read the file from the hidden directory.

As you might imagine, your hard disk or floppy diskette would begin to fill up rather quickly with old files in the hidden directory. This could be a problem unless you eliminate the unwanted files using the purge command of SafetyNet.

To do this, you must exit the program you are working in, load SafetyNet, let it give you a list of the files in the hidden directory, purge the unwanted files, exit SafetyNet, reload your program, and go back to where you were before. Whew!

Herein lies the first nagging problem with SafetyNet. If you are trying to save an important file when your hard disk fills up, you might have difficulty until you clear space on the disk with the purge command of SafetyNet. In the meantime, you'll probably have to save the file in question on a floppy diskette.

The second problem that I discovered was when Word Perfect was used while SafetyNet was installed. Word Perfect has a excellent feature that automatically saves backup copies of the document you are working on every five or 10 minutes, or however frequently you desire. The only problem is that whenever Word Perfect does so, SafetyNet proceeds to also back up the file and put it in the hidden directory. This tends to fill up a disk in a hurry.

The constant need to purge files is so annoying that I now prefer not to use SafetyNet with the Word Perfect program.

The bottom line: While I'm still enamored with SafetyNet, I don't recommend it if you use Word Perfect or other programs that create



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For example, if you're working on a document, every time you save a new version, the older ver-

fect or other programs that create backup files as you go along. ■

Hillel Segal is an independent computer consultant who specializes in helping businesses select and use personal computer software and hardware. He can be reached at the Personal Computer Managers Association, P.O. Box 9003, Boulder 80301.